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# **Russell's Discussion of Judgment in *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*: Did Russell have a Theory of Judgment in 1918?<sup>1</sup>**

Anssi Korhonen

## **Abstract**

Russell's discussion of belief in *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* is brief, tentative and mostly negative. The standard view has been that in the Lectures, Russell no longer believed in the multiple relation theory of judgment but was not yet in a position to articulate an alternative conception of belief; that came only a little later, with the psychological account of belief that is found in such works as *On Propositions* (1919) and *The Analysis of Mind* (1921). In this paper, I challenge the standard view. First, I present evidence to support the claim that the views that Russell held in 1918 at least leave room for a version of the multiple relation theory, albeit one that would be rather different from the view he held before. Second, I consider some key developments in Russell's thinking about judgment during 1913–1918. These developments indicate the direction in which he may have been moving. Third, I present some speculation – partly relying on a recent work by Fraser MacBride – regarding a positive account of judgment in Russell's Lectures; an important connection that emerges from this speculation is one between the multiple relation theory of judgment and the distinction between *positive and negative facts*.

Key words: judgment, proposition, multiple relation theory of judgment, negative facts

1. Russell's discussion of the nature of judgment in *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, Lecture IV, is brief and, on the face of it, rather tentative.<sup>2</sup> Russell himself acknowledges this, as when he apologizes to his audience for “pointing out difficulties rather than laying down

quite clear solutions” (Russell 1918a: 199). Here, as in most of the Lectures, Russell is concerned with the discovery of the logical form of a certain range of facts. In this case, these are the facts expressed by *propositional verbs*, such as “believing”, “doubting”, “wishing”, and so on.<sup>3</sup> The analysis of such facts – facts containing two or more verbs (“Othello believes that Desdemona loves Cassio”) will introduce a new logical form, one that is distinct from the form of atomic facts, or facts containing just one verb.<sup>4</sup> Their analysis also presents fresh difficulties distinct from those involved in the analysis of molecular propositions.

Russell gave his Lectures just before he set out to think hard about a complex set of issues relating to *neutral monism* and its acceptability: the nature of presentation (awareness) and the elimination of what Russell sometimes called the “pin-point Subject”,<sup>5</sup> the nature of belief and the problem of error, and the nature of demonstrative reference or “emphatic particulars”, as Russell called them. Two passages by later Russell himself comment on this development:

It was in 1918 [...] that I first became interested in the definition of ‘meaning’ and in the relation of language to fact. Until then I had regarded language as ‘transparent’ and had never examined what makes its relation to the non-linguistic world. (1959: 145)

The problem of meaning is one which seems to me to have been unduly neglected by logicians; it was this problem which first led me, about twenty years ago, to abandon the anti-psychological opinion in which I had previously believed. (1938: 362)

Russell had been occupied by neutral monism already before the Great War.<sup>6</sup> But as these two later comments indicate, he now set out to tackle his problems from a new perspective that introduced “meaning” and psychology.<sup>7</sup> The change of perspective is anticipated already in

*PLA*. Consider for example the term “proposition”, which points in two directions. On the one hand, Russell continues to hold that propositions are *nothing* (1918a: 196); and if you introduce propositions as objects of attitudes, you may keep that provided you remember that it is not the truth and that in reality “you have to analyze up the proposition and treat your belief differently” (1918a: 197). On the other hand, he also holds that for the purposes of the sort of logical discussion that is the concern of the Lectures, “it is natural to concentrate upon the proposition as the thing that is going to be our typical vehicle on the duality of truth and falsehood” (1918a: 165). A proposition, understood in this way, is just a complex *symbol* (1918a: 166); it is a piece of language, a sentence in the indicative mood or maybe a sentence-nominalization. Russell holds, furthermore, that *facts* are truth- and falsehood-makers for propositions (1918a: 163), so that once we concentrate on the proposition as the truth-value bearer, we are thereby focusing, precisely, on the “relation of language to fact”.

Still further, Russell has this to say about propositions *qua* symbols:

When I speak of a symbol I simply mean something that “means” something else, and as to what I mean by “meaning” I am not prepared to tell you. [...] I think that the notion of meaning is always more or less psychological, and that it is not possible to get a pure logical theory of meaning, nor therefore of symbolism. (1918a: 167)

Here – like elsewhere in the Lectures – Russell sets psychology aside, not because it is irrelevant to his concerns but because he is not yet prepared to take up issues that belong to psychology.<sup>8</sup> That development would indeed take place only slightly later. What is left are the sort of “more purely logical questions” (1918a: 196) with which he and Wittgenstein had been occupied before the war.

The discussion of belief in *PLA* presents Russell in transition on the problem of judgments. On the one hand, he continues to advocate the basic intuition behind the *multiple relation theory of judgment* (MRTJ): “The belief does not really contain a proposition as a constituent but only contains the constituents of the proposition as constituents” (1918a: 197). On the other hand, it also seems, since we know what happened after *PLA*, that Russell was able to overcome difficulties in the analysis of belief only by re-psychologizing the proposition; this step is explicit in *On Propositions: What They Are and How They Mean* (1919) and subsequent work, as in *The Analysis of Mind* (1921).

Much of the scholarly commentary on Russell’s discussion of judgment in *PLA* has been in line with this dualism. Thus the interpretative claim has been advanced by many that the Russell of *PLA* no longer believed – or no longer really believed – in MRTJ but that he was not yet in a position to formulate an adequate alternative. *Wittgenstein’s influence*, moreover, is usually seen as decisive here, so much so that the complex dialectic of Russell’s changing views is seen exclusively through the prism of Wittgenstein’s influence on his former tutor, or at any rate as so many reactions on Russell’s side to points derived from Wittgenstein: first, it is held that it was the criticism that Wittgenstein directed at MRTJ that left Russell without a theory of judgment in 1913; second, this criticism is also seen as the decisive factor that made Russell abandon work on the *Theory of Knowledge* -project that same year; third, it is further held that the reasons which were operative in 1913 were still decisive in 1918. Thus, although the Russell of *PLA* had come to accept the core of Wittgenstein’s criticism, or the core of what he took to be that criticism, the lesson was still essentially negative in 1918: that is, Russell now knew, thanks to Wittgenstein’s influence, what judgment could not be, but was not yet in a position to say what it was.<sup>9</sup>

There is no denying Wittgenstein’s influence on Russell. The textual evidence is quite clear on this point, as when Russell explains in the short Preface to the published versions of

the Lectures that they “are very largely concerned with explaining certain ideas which I learnt from my friend and former pupil Ludwig Wittgenstein” (1918a: 160). But the evidence also suggests a picture of “Russell and judgment in 1918” that is more nuanced than the standard story. In fact, I’m inclined to go so far as to argue that in 1918, when he gave the Lectures, Russell *did* have a theory of judgment. It was still a version of the multiple relation theory, although in a radically new form, which was necessitated by things that he got from Wittgenstein.<sup>10</sup>

2. There are no less than five observations suggesting that the standard story needs revision.

First, when Russell definitively repudiated the multiple relation theory 1919, his explanation of why the renunciation was necessary had, on the face of it, nothing to do with the criticism that Wittgenstein had directed at MRTJ in 1913:

The theory of belief which I formerly advocated, namely, that it consisted in a multiple relation of the subject to the objects constituting the “objective”, i.e. the fact that makes the belief true or false, is rendered impossible by the rejection of the subject. The constituents of the belief cannot, when the subject is rejected, be the same as the constituents of its “objective”. (1919a: 295)

Saying that Russell’s stated reason has nothing to do with Wittgenstein’s criticism of MRTJ presupposes a reasoned opinion on what that criticism was. But whatever exactly it may have been – and there is no scholarly consensus on that point – it is reasonably clear that Wittgenstein was not yet concerned with the ‘rejection of the subject’ in 1913 and, consequently, that this could not have been the point of his criticism.

Wittgenstein's rejection of the subject, or the "soul", is only announced in the *Tractatus*. There Wittgenstein argues that the use of such forms of expression as "A believes that *p* is the case", etc. suggests a correlation of a fact and a subject; in reality, however, the form is "'p' says p", which is a correlation of facts by means of a correlation of their objects and shows that there is no soul as conceived in "superficial psychology of the present day" or "modern theory of knowledge".<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, when Wittgenstein gave a sketch of the form of belief-ascriptions in the *Notes on Logic*, the emphasis was on the *bipolarity* of propositions – a feature that Russell had failed to appreciate, according to Wittgenstein – and not on the elimination of the subject. Rather than eliminating the subject, Wittgenstein in fact presupposes it, as when he argues that in order correctly to analyze "A believes *p*", we have to make A stand in a relation to the two poles, *a* and *b*, of the proposition *a-p-b* (Wittgenstein 1913: 97).<sup>12</sup>

Second, when we look at what Russell actually says in *PLA*, we see him continuing to advocate MRTJ; or at least we see him continuing to accept its basic underlying idea. This is one of the two key points on judgment that he wants to get through to his audience:

There really are *two main things that one wants to notice* in this matter that I am treating of just now. The first is the *impossibility of treating the proposition believed as an independent entity*, entering as a unit into the occurrence of a belief [...] (1918a: 199; italics added)

Third, Russell not only acknowledge Wittgenstein's influence on him on the topic of judgment but was quite emphatic on the point. But what he says indicates that what he thought is called for is not a renunciation of MRTJ but a revision. The previous quotation continues:

[A]nd the other is the *impossibility of putting the subordinate verb on a level with its terms as an object term in the belief*. That is a point in which I think that the theory of judgment which I set forth once in print some years ago was a little unduly simple, because I did then treat the object verb as if one could put it as just an object like the terms, as if one could put “loves” on a level with Desdemona and Cassio as a term for the relation “believe”. (1918a: 199; italics added)

Russell makes the same point in another context. In “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description”, a paper originally published in 1911, he had explained that if I judge, for example, that A loves B, the judgment is an event consisting of a specific four-term-relation of *judging* between me and A and love and B, with judging occurring as a “relating relation”. This is the familiar MRTJ. When the 1911-essay was reprinted in 1917 in *Mysticism and Logic*, Russell appended the following footnote to the explanation: “I have been persuaded by Mr. Wittgenstein that this theory is somewhat unduly simple [...]” (1911: 154). Putting these two passages together, we see that Russell’s second main thing – that the ‘subordinate verb’ cannot be put as an object term in a belief complex – came from Wittgenstein; but we also see that the modification has to do with a point on which Russell says his old theory had been somewhat too simple. Admittedly, one may regard this as an “understatement” on Russell’s part; but the point remains that what is needed *is* presented as a modification of MRTJ.<sup>13</sup>

The fourth observation relates to what Russell wrote in 1959 about why he did eventually reject MRTJ:



In my belief [that Socrates loves Plato], the unity of the complex depends upon the relating relation *believing*, where *love* does not enter as a relating relation, but as one of the terms between which the relation of believing holds. [...] I abandoned this theory, both because I ceased to believe in the ‘subject’, and because I no longer thought that a relation can occur significantly as a term, except when a paraphrase is possible in which it does not so occur. (1959: 182)

If we follow up on this comment, we should conclude that one of the two reasons for renouncing MRTJ (the ‘Wittgenstein reason’, having to do with how a relation occurs in a fact) was in place in the Lectures, while the other reason, having to do with discarding the “pin-point Subject”, came slightly later: the second reason is asserted in *On Propositions* but is absent from the Lectures. If we take the latter reason to have been decisive – as is suggested, I think, by the comment in Russell (1919a) that was quoted above – then there remains the possibility that *PLA* does leave room for a version of MRTJ, albeit one that differs from the earlier one on a crucial point; how crucial the point is, is something that I shall consider below.

The fifth and final observation concerns a further point about the passage from *On Propositions* with which we began. Consider carefully how the passage describes MRTJ: MRTJ is the theory that belief consists “in a multiple relation of the subject to the objects constituting the ‘objective’, i.e. the fact that makes the belief true or false”. Now, this is clearly different from MRTJ as found in *Philosophical Essays*, the Introduction to *Principia*, *The Problems of Philosophy* or *Theory of Knowledge*. On each of these earlier versions of the theory, a judgment is said to be true when there is a complex corresponding to the judgment and false when there is no such corresponding complex: truth is aligned with the existence and falsehood with non-existence of “complexes” or “facts”. For example, Othello’s belief

that Desdemona loves Cassio is false because there is no complex unity appropriately compounded of Desdemona, loving and Cassio and corresponding to Othello's belief (Russell 1912: 75). In *PLA*, on the other hand, Russell embraced positive and negative facts as truth- and false-makers for positive and negative atomic propositions. On this view, an atomic proposition "*d* has the relation *L* to *c*", if false, is false because it is made false by the negative fact that *d* does not have the relation *L* to *c*. This is one well-known and much discussed doctrine in the Lectures. But the passage from *On Propositions* suggests that at one time Russell entertained a plan of combining a new version of MRTJ with the distinction between positive and negative facts. This is the idea that I shall explore in this paper.

3. In *PLA*, the discussion of judgment centers on the "puzzle about the nature of belief" that Russell explains in Section 3 of Lecture IV. The puzzle is inextricably intertwined with the discovery, which Russell attributes to Wittgenstein, that we cannot make "a map-in-space of a belief" (1918a: 198–9) and that, therefore, belief-facts introduce a completely new species into the inventory of logical forms of facts. Here is the key passage:

The point is in connection with there being two verbs in the judgment and with the fact that both verbs have got to occur as verbs, because if a thing is a verb it cannot occur otherwise than as a verb. Suppose I take "A believes that B loves C." "Othello believes that Desdemona loves Cassio." There you have a false belief. You have this odd state of affairs that *the verb "loves" occurs in that proposition and seems to occur as relating Desdemona to Cassio whereas in fact it does not do so*, but yet it does occur as a verb, it does occur in the sort of way that a verb should do. I mean that when A believes that B loves C, you have to have a verb in the place where "loves" occurs. You cannot put a substantive in its place. Therefore it is clear that the subordinate verb (i.e. the verb other

than believing) is functioning as a verb, and seems to be relating two terms, but as a matter of fact does not when the judgment happens to be false. That is what constitutes the puzzle about the nature of belief. (1918a: 198; italics added)

Russell's description of the puzzle is not very helpful, even granting that what he is trying to convey to his audience is his own perplexity. Describing the "odd state of affairs", he speaks of a verb occurring "in that proposition". But which proposition is that? He has just argued in the previous section that the correct analysis of belief does not mention propositions in his old sense. Nor is he talking about linguistic propositions here. But then again we cannot simply substitute "judgment" for "proposition", thinking that Russell is being careless here. For it is far from clear that the verb – relation, that is – "loves" occurs in Othello's judgment that Desdemona loves Cassio, or that it even seems to occur in that judgment as relating her to him.

Of course, we do know *why* Russell was perplexed about belief in *PLA*. We know this because we know the context in which the perplexity arose. It is this context that we need to consider to see not only what the puzzle was but also whether Russell had something constructive to say about the topic of judgment at the time when he gave the Lectures. What is clear enough is that the puzzle about the nature of belief and Wittgenstein's logical discovery about the logical form of belief-facts relate to Russell's old theory of judgment, the one that he now perceived as "a little unduly simple". The Lectures do contain further material that is relevant here. It is found in the discussion of *understanding* at the beginning of Lecture III (1918a: 181–3); there, as in the discussion of the puzzle, Wittgenstein is mentioned explicitly as the source of important new ideas. Beyond the Lectures, further elucidation may be obtained from considering where Russell stood vis-à-vis Wittgenstein and the topic of

judgment in 1914, immediately after the event of Wittgenstein's criticism of MRTJ, which allegedly destroyed that theory.

4. What underlies the puzzle about the nature of belief is Wittgenstein's notorious *nonsense objection* to MRTJ.<sup>14</sup> Wittgenstein had argued in *Notes on Logic* that the propositional character of judging, i.e., the feature that judging is necessarily judging that so-and-so, is inevitably lost once judging is construed as an act which puts a multiplicity of entities in front of the judging mind. This is, in effect, to treat the entities with which the judgment is concerned as "substantives", and then there is nothing to stop one from putting a substantive for a verb, and the result will be a nonsensical judgment:

When we say A judges that, etc. then we have to mention a whole proposition which A judges. It will not do either to mention only its constituents, or its constituents and form but not in the proper order. This shows that a proposition itself must occur in the statement to the effect that it is judged. [...] In "A judges (that) p", p cannot be replaced by a proper name. This is apparent if we substitute "A judges that p is true and not-p is false". [...] Every right theory of judgment must make it impossible for me to judge that "this table penholders the book" (Russell's theory does not satisfy this requirement). [...] The structure of the proposition must be recognized and then the rest is easy.  
(Wittgenstein 1913: 96)

Russell was not blind to the fact that judgment is propositional or that with judgment, "the structure of the proposition must be recognized". By the time he went to Harvard in the spring of 1914, however, he had lost his faith in the ability of the MRTJ to cope with the problem. Before discussing the conclusions that he had drawn by that time, it is useful to have before

our minds a rough chronology of Russell's attempts to "recognize the structure of the proposition" (or "propositional structure", as I shall call it) within the framework of MRTJ:

- 1) Propositional structure derives from, or is grounded in, the *sense* or *direction* of the judging relation (before *Theory of Knowledge*);
- 2) Propositional structure derives from, or is grounded in, *logical form* (in *Theory of Knowledge*);
- 3) Propositional structure derives from, or is grounded in, *neutral fact* (in Russell's working notes that probably date from late May of 1913);
- 4) Propositional structure derives from, or is grounded in, the two verbs of a judgment fact; this is the *two verbs solution*, the negative part of which is formulated by the spring of 1914, and of the positive part of which there are indications in *PLA*.

I shall not discuss the first two items on the list, except for a reminder that the reason why Russell introduced logical forms in *Theory of Knowledge* was precisely that he needed a way of recognizing propositional structure without invoking propositions. This is shown by the following passage (it is about understanding rather than judging, but it applies to the latter notion as well):

[W]hen we are concerned with a proposition which may be false, and where, therefore, the actual complex is not given, we have only, as it were, the "idea" or "suggestion" of the terms being united in such a complex; and this, evidently, requires that the general form of the merely supposed complex should be given. More simply, *to understand "A and B are similar"*, we must know what is supposed to be done with *A* and *B* and *similarity*, i.e. what it is for two terms to have a relation; that is, we must understand the

form of the complex which must exist if the proposition is true. (Russell 1913: 116; italics added)

Apparently, Russell lost faith in logical forms in this specific sense soon after their introduction. This development takes us to stage 3) in our chronology, which consists of a series of working notes which Russell may have composed in late May 1913:

Three objects  $x$ ,  $R$ ,  $y$  form one or other of two complexes  $xRy$  or  $\sim xRy$ .

The *proposition*  $xRy$  points to either indifferently: both contain nothing but  $x$  and  $R$  and  $y$ .

When we *understand* the propositions, what is happening points equally to either of these two complexes – at least it points to whichever there is of the two. [...]

It *looks* as if there actually were always a relation of  $x$  and  $R$  and  $y$  whenever they form *either* of the two complexes, and as if this were perceived in understanding. If there is such neutral fact, it ought to be a *constituent* of the positive or negative fact. It will provide a meaning for *possibility*. [...]

(1) Call the positive fact  $+(xRy)$ , and the negative fact  $-(xRy)$ .

(2) Call the neutral *fact*  $\pm(xRy)$ , and the *proposition*  $xRy$ .

(3) Call the judgment  $J\{+(xRy)\}$  or  $J\{-(xRy)\}$  or  $J\{\pm(xRy)\}$

No, this won't do; it must be  $+J(xRy)$ ,  $-J(xRy)$ ,  $\pm J(xRy)$ . Otherwise we should have to know before judging.

Judgment involves the *neutral* fact, not the positive or negative fact.

The neutral fact has a relation to a positive fact, or to a negative fact.

Judgment asserts *one* of these. It will still be a multiple relation, but its terms will not be the same as in my old theory. The neutral fact replaces the *form*.

Call neutral fact “positively directed” when it corresponds to a positive fact, “negatively directed” when it corresponds to a negative fact. [...]

There will only be a neutral fact when the objects are of the right types. This introduces great difficulties (Russell 1913: 195–9; all italics in the original)

Several important points emerge from a reflection on these notes. First, they introduce the notion of “neutral fact”. Talk of the form as being replaced by the neutral fact indicates that Russell conceived the idea *after* rejecting logical forms; or at least that he conceived it as a response to whatever criticisms Wittgenstein directed against Russell’s theory of judgment at the time.<sup>15</sup> They suggest, furthermore, that “neutral fact” was introduced for the same purpose as logical form, that is, to capture the propositionality of judgment.

Second, the notes also introduce the distinction between *positive and negative facts* ( $\pm$  - facts). These two innovations, neutral facts and  $\pm$  -facts, are clearly meant as complementary notions. The idea here, I venture to guess, is to use “neutral fact” to make sense of the propositionality of judgment (“Judgment involves neutral fact”), and to use “ $\pm$  -facts” to find worldly correlates for judgments (“Judgment asserts one of these”). Being *neutral*, neutral facts fall short of being positive or negative, and hence fall short of being *fully actual*, as it were; hence they may occur as constituents in judgments as well in  $\pm$  -facts. Being *facts*, neutral facts are presumably *unities*. One thing where this might help is in securing the propositionality of judgment and in circumventing Wittgenstein’s nonsense objection. But Russell senses difficulties here, witness the final note in the quotation: for there to be a neutral fact, its constituents must be “of the right types”, and this “introduces great difficulties”.

Third, Russell continues to assert that judgment is a multiple relation. Unfortunately, he does not tell what its terms are supposed to be, and it is easy to see that the working notes are quite unclear on this point. On the one hand, Russell's symbolism, as exemplified by “ $+J(xRy)$ ”, suggests that judgment is in fact a binary rather than a multiple relation, as it seems to indicate that judgments operate on something like propositional contents or maybe states of affairs after the manner of the *Tractatus*.<sup>16</sup> Such entities, however, would be excluded by general Russellian principles. On the other hand, that symbolism is inconsistent with Russell's explanation of judgment as involving a neutral fact standing in a relation to a positive or negative fact. And there is the further point, also noticed by Carey (2003: 38), that “subject” is nowhere mentioned in the working notes. For these reasons, it is difficult, if not impossible, to make anything definitive of these notes on this point.

The notion of a neutral fact, as sketched in Russell's notes, may be a non-starter.<sup>17</sup> What does emerge from the notes, however, is the important new idea that judgment as a multiple relation might be combined with the theoretical innovation of  $\pm$ -facts.

5. The next step in our chronology takes us to the early 1914 and Harvard, where Russell lectured on logic (with Harry T. Costello as a teaching assistant) and theory of knowledge. Lectures notes by T. S. Eliot and Victor F. Lenzen suggest that, by that time, Russell had come to accept Wittgenstein's criticism of MRTJ as definitive.

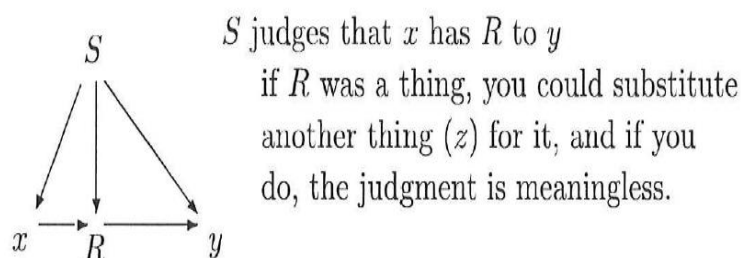
Consider first the following passage from Eliot's notes of Russell's course on Advanced Logic:<sup>18</sup>



April 9

You never can tell whether a proposition is true or false by examining it; you can only find out by examining the fact. True and false propositions are in some sense incomplete symbols; but in a very different sense from descriptions.

My old theory of judgment



Russell accepts the infinite judgment.

T. S. Eliot's note of Russell's course on Advanced Logic, Lecture 26, April 9, 1914;

edited by Bernard Linsky

Here we see Russell's formulation of the nonsense objection: if you treat the subordinate relation as a thing, you can substitute another thing for it, "and if you do, the judgment is meaningless". The phrase "My old theory of judgment" here clearly refers to published versions of MRTJ, primarily to the explanation in Chapter 12 of *The Problems of Philosophy*. Judgment is there explained to be a relation which has a "sense" or "direction". When a subject ( $S$ ) judges, it puts the objects ( $x$ ,  $R$ , and  $y$ ) in a certain order; here  $R$ , too, is "a brick in the structure, not the cement" (1912: 74), and hence it is treated as a thing or a substantive, a feature that gives rise to Wittgenstein's objection.

Arguably and plausibly, Russell spend at least a part of that day's lecture explaining views from Wittgenstein's *Notes on Logic*. As Bernard Linsky's contribution the present volume shows,<sup>19</sup> Russell's next lecture on Advanced Logic, on April 11<sup>th</sup>, was clearly

concerned with points from the *Notes*; so Russell may well have explained the nonsense objection against MRTJ in the course of discussing Wittgenstein's views.<sup>20</sup> It seems, moreover, that the nonsense or meaninglessness objection was not just a report on Wittgenstein's theory. The quotation from Eliot's note includes the claim that propositions "are in some sense incomplete symbols", and this does not fit Wittgenstein's views but, rather, fits the multiple-relation theory. In the *Notes on Logic*, Wittgenstein argues that neither the "sense" nor the "meaning" of a proposition is a thing; these words are incomplete symbols (1913: 94). On the other hand, Wittgenstein clearly thinks that a proposition is a *complete* symbol, as when he argues that "a proposition itself must occur in the statement to the effect that it is judged", as in the quotation in Section 4 above. So I take it that Russell was explaining what he himself had come think about his "old theory of judgment".

This is in line with what is found in another document relating to Russell's teaching at Harvard 1914: Victor F. Lenzen's notes on Russell's lectures on Theory of Knowledge.<sup>21</sup> They are also a little more informative of where Russell stood vis-à-vis the topic of judgment at that time. The following reproduces sheet [58] of Lenzen's notes:

[58]

Take I believe Jones hates Smith. Two verbs—both must occur as verbs.  
hate not substantive.

Suppose [I] say—Weather is wet today—nice yesterday. Two facts.

I believe Jones hates Smith—single fact—contains two verbs. Constitutes oddity of propositional thought.

Verb occurring in a fact. Jones hates Smith. "hates" points to a different sort of thing than Smith or Jones—Unites them. Gives unity to the fact. Relation between things different from things related.

In facts believing, disbelieving—two of these verbs coming in—logical form of fact that you believe peculiar.

Remains Judgment—possibility error—not dual relation—Don't simply have—I believe a certain proposition.

Sheet [58] of Notes that Victor F. Lenzen took of Russell's seminar on Theory of Knowledge

at Harvard 1914; edited by Bernard Linsky.

Here we see Russell making points that are familiar from *PLA*. First, in a belief-fact with two verbs, both verbs must occur as verbs; *pace* Russell's old theory of judgment, the subordinate verb really is a verb and not a substantive. Second, a belief-fact is nevertheless a single fact, and not two facts. Third, there is Russell's standard argument that the possibility of error shows that judgment cannot be a dual relation; we do not simply say, "I believe a proposition". Together these points constitute an "oddity of propositional thought": the logical form of a belief-fact is "peculiar", because two verbs come in.

We see, then, that by the spring of 1914, Russell has drawn the conclusions that many interpreters see as an impasse: he has derived from Wittgenstein the lesson about verbs occurring as verbs; nevertheless, he continues to affirm the basic idea of MRTJ.

6. The chronology above mentions the "two verbs solution" to the problem of recognizing propositional structure. But so far we have only seen the negative side of the matter, the "puzzle about the nature of belief", or "oddity of propositional thought", which was in place already in 1914. To make a case for the constructive side, we must enter the realm of speculation. This speculation, though, is not without textual evidence. Some of the speculation makes use of MacBride (2013), an important recent essay on the Russell-Wittgenstein schism. I then add a further speculative layer to MacBride's reading of Russell's 1918 view of judgment.

MacBride is more optimistic than most commentators about the prospects of finding in *PLA* a constructive notion of judgment under the general heading of "multiple relation theory". As MacBride himself plausibly puts it, it "seems an unlikely hypothesis that

Russell's continued championing of the multiple relation theory during this period was merely a consequence of intellectual inertia" (2013: 232).

Prior to 1914/1918, Russell had held, as Landini (2007: 57) puts it, that "universals have both a predicable nature and an individual nature". Accepting a lesson from Wittgenstein, however, Russell came to reject this doctrine. He now argued that predicates and relations can never occur except as predicates or relations, never as subjects (1918a: 182).<sup>22</sup> Thus, on the face of it, Russell had come round to a view similar to Frege's distinction between objects and concepts, of which the latter are unsaturated or essentially predicative. In fact, however, Russell's position is rather more involved. For Russell must now recognize *three* kinds of occurrences of constituents in facts:

- (1) Occurrences as subjects;
- (2) Occurrences as relating relations (or as predicating predicates);
- (3) Purely predicative occurrences (occurrences "as verbs").

MacBride (2013: 234) argues that recognition of (3) is necessitated not only by the new version of MRTJ but also by such innovations as *negative facts*. Our chronology above suggests, though, that in Russell's thought there was an intrinsic link between the two. We saw how Russell, in 1913, had the idea that neutral facts are involved in both judgments and  $\pm$ -facts (although, to be sure, he failed to make full sense of this). In *PLA*, this dual role is taken over by purely predicative occurrences. Russell continues to accept negative facts, a view which he had defended already at Harvard.<sup>23</sup> He says nothing directly about their structure, but commitment to purely predicative occurrences is nevertheless plausibly read into *PLA*, too. Firstly, there is the general observation that MacBride, too, makes: the fact that *a* and *b* are *not* related by *R*, if it is a fact, can hardly be compounded of *a* and *b*, *actually* related by *R*.

Secondly and more importantly, the 1919-essay *On Propositions* argues that the distinction between positive and negative facts is a primitive distinction between two opposing qualities, positive and negative (1919a: 279–280). Supposing that something like “[*aRb*]<sub>±</sub>” is a reasonable schematic representation of the structure of Russellian atomic facts, this clearly presupposes that universals have purely predicative occurrences. And this view is plausibly read into *PLA*, too, as it is clearly Russell’s version of Wittgenstein’s idea of bipolarity.<sup>24</sup> Thirdly, the only way to circumvent the general observation and avoid purely predicative occurrences is in fact to incorporate negativity into the universal itself. Russell, however, is explicit in rejecting negative universals in *PLA*.<sup>25</sup>

What then of MRTJ and purely predicative occurrences? MacBride makes two points about the matter. First, he spells out in a little more detail the conception of judgment towards which Russell was drawn in *PLA*. Predicative occurrences, MacBride (2013: 235) observes, were exactly what Russell needed (i) to cope with the “puzzle of how to deal with error” (1918a: 198), and (ii) to respond to the nonsense objection. For if an occurrence of *loves* in “Othello believes that Desdemona loves Cassio” is indeed purely predicative, it can occur where it does occur without creating an actual unity; for the same reason, the other objects of the subordinate complex cannot occupy the purely predicative position. The direction of Russell’s thought is thus clear: he now conceives of judgment as a family of multiple relations, each possessing its own internal structure, with higher-order argument position or positions reserved for the subordinate verb and lower-order argument positions reserved for the objects of which the relation is predicated.

So far, this adds little by way of a positive construction to the “puzzle about the nature of belief”. It is therefore useful that MacBride (2013: 235) adds a further “speculative flourish”. He now refers to Arthur Prior’s discussion of the conception of judgment that Ramsey sketched in the 1920s, and suggests that “what Russell may have been tentatively

edging towards” in *PLA* is an appreciation of a far more radical version of [MRTJ] than hitherto countenanced”.

MacBride notes how Prior distances himself from MRTJ (Prior 1967: 229). Elaborated, the criticism may be formulated as follows, using Prior’s example of Othello’s belief that Desdemona is unfaithful.<sup>26</sup> The old version of MRTJ is a theory which dispenses with objective falsehoods (“Desdemona’s infidelity”) and with propositions (“that Desdemona is unfaithful”). It does this by rephrasing “Othello believes that Desdemona is unfaithful” as “Othello ascribes unfaithfulness to Desdemona”; the belief-fact is thus not about any complex entity at all but is about two real entities, Desdemona and infidelity, to which Othello stands “in the complex relation of ascribing the latter to the former” (1971: 8). Prior objects to this, pointing out that MRTJ, although rightly dispensing with ‘Desdemona’s unfaithfulness’ (and also with ‘that Desdemona is unfaithful’), still asks us to believe that there is such an entity as *infidelity* (universal) and such an entity as *her fidelity* (a fact), which makes Othello’s belief false – Prior’s example involves a negative universal, which Russell would not have approved of, but the complication is immaterial here. But propositions and facts, Prior argues, are not the only logical constructions or incomplete symbols that must be paraphrased away (1971: 9). He argues that, given the identity:

Othello ascribes infidelity to Desdemona = Othello believes that Desdemona is unfaithful,

we must regard the right-hand side of the identity as explanatorily more basic because what needs to be explained (away) is precisely the apparent reference to an abstract object, a universal. Hence MRTJ stands condemned, according to Prior.<sup>27</sup>

But if propositions are “logical constructions”, as Prior thinks they are, then the right-hand side, too, will have to be detailed accordingly (cf. Prior 1971: Chapter 2.2). To this end, he eliminates the apparent name “that Desdemona is unfaithful” by parsing “Othello believes that Desdemona is unfaithful” as “Othello believes that/Desdemona is unfaithful”. Understood in this way, the sentence is not even apparently about a proposition but is about Othello and Desdemona. And to appreciate the way the statement is about them, we note that although ‘\_ thinks that \_’ is not itself a predicate, it does occur as a part of the predicate ‘\_ thinks that \_ is unfaithful’, which expresses a compound relation that might hold between Othello and Desdemona and is said by our sentence to hold between them.

As MacBride (2013: 235 fn. 1) notes, it is not really much of a stretch to hold that Russell’s new direction of thought in *PLA* in fact sails very close to Prior’s own constructive suggestion regarding the semantics of belief attributions; seeing judgment as involving a compound multiple relation helps us to make sense of how ‘relating relation’ and ‘purely predicative occurrences’ could be reconciled with each other by incorporating the latter into the former.

This is in fact the conclusion that Ramsey drew in 1927, although he did not claim to find it in Russell but presented it as an elaboration of what Russell had at one time held about judgment. Ramsey adds the comment that “it is desirable that we should try to find out more about” judgment construed as a compound multiple relation, and judgment “varies when the form of the proposition believed is varied” (1927: 157).

7. In the previous section, I argued that in Russell’s mind-setting, there was an intrinsic connection between the new MRTJ and the distinction between positive and negative facts. In this section, I give a brief elaboration of what was involved in that connection.

At the beginning of Lecture III of *PLA*, Russell explains how understanding and acquaintance for names and particulars differ from understanding and acquaintance for predicates and universals. Here is the relevant passage:

To understand a name you must be acquainted with the particular of which it is a name, and you must know that it is the name of that particular. *You do not, that is to say, have any suggestion of the form of a proposition, whereas in understanding a predicate you do.* To understand “red”, for instance, is to understand what is meant by saying that a thing is red. You have to bring in the form of a proposition. You do not have to know, concerning any particular “this”, that “This is red” but you have to know what is the meaning of saying that anything is red. You have to understand what one would call “being red”. The importance of that is in connection with the theory of types [...]. It is in the fact that a predicate can never occur except as a predicate. When it seems to occur as a subject, the phrase wants amplifying and explaining, unless, of course, you are talking about the word itself. [...] When you understand “red” it means that you understand propositions of the form “ $x$  is red”. So that the understanding of a predicate is something a little more complicated than the understanding of a name, just because of that. Exactly the same applies to relations. (1918a: 182; italics added)

Understanding predicates and relations, Russell now argues, differs in an important respect from understanding names: hence, acquaintance with a universal must also differ from acquaintance with a particular. And the difference is that understanding a predicate involves *understanding the form of a position*, while understanding a name does not. Russell notes, moreover, that this is an important point because it connects with the issue of different kinds of occurrences.



This account contrasts with what Russell held in *Theory of Knowledge* regarding logical forms. There he explained – as was noted in section 4 above – that to understand “*A* and *B* are similar”, we must understand “what is to be done with *A* and *B* and similarity” and that this introduces the form of dual complexes (expressed by “something stands in some relation to something”). From the standpoint of *PLA*, this is wrong, because it fails to register the peculiar logical form of predicates. Suppose that *S* understands “*A* is red”. This is now not to be understood as

$$U(S, a, \text{redness}, \alpha(\mathbf{x})),$$

where  $\alpha(\mathbf{x})$  is the logical form of all subject-predicate complexes (cf. Russell 1913: 113).

Russell now holds that understanding must take the following form:

$$U(S, a, \text{— is red}).$$

This is somewhat misleading of what Russell intends, because it might be taken to suggest that understanding involves a relation between a subject and an entity. What the new construal intends, however, is the following. First, there is no such thing as *redness*. Second, the predicate ‘red’ is not understood through acquaintance with an abstract universal but by understanding what is said when a thing is said to be red; that is, we understand ‘red’ when we understand how things are said to be when a thing is said to be red.<sup>28</sup>

Understanding a predicate thus presupposes understanding a propositional form, according to Russell. But now the question arises: What *is* a propositional form? After all, Russell continues to be committed to MRTJ, and hence there aren’t any propositions. What

there are, or what there could be, though, are *forms of facts*. But what are forms of facts? How can there be a form of a fact if there is no facts of that form?

Russell's conception of fact is one on which this is a legitimate and pressing question: a fact is an actuality, and there are no merely possible facts.<sup>29</sup> The following response is available to Russell, however. Whether a proposition (an atomic proposition) is true or false, there is the positive or negative fact which makes the proposition true or makes it false. And these facts have, or can be said to have forms.<sup>30</sup> So I suggest that Russell's new direction of thought – the speculative version of MRTJ that has been outlined here – in fact requires there to be positive and negative facts. Thus, Russell was committed, to the following line of thought to Russell:

*First step:* Understanding words for universals presupposes acquaintance with  
*propositional forms*; better, involves understanding *propositional forms*

*Second step:* But there aren't any propositional forms, because there aren't any  
propositions.

*Third step:* But there are *facts*.

*Fourth step:* So, there could be *forms of facts*, rather than forms of propositions.

*Fifth step:* But what is a form of a fact, if there aren't any facts of that form?

*Sixth step:* This question is answered by introducing *positive and negative facts*  
corresponding to atomic propositions; there is a fact corresponding to an atomic  
proposition whether that proposition is true or false.

*Seventh step:* So, the assumption of positive and negative facts guarantees that there  
will be "sufficiently many" forms of facts.

*Eight Step:* MRTJ, as conceived in Russell's Lectures on logical atomism, requires  
there to be positive and negative facts.

If this is along the right lines, it is inaccurate to say, as was said above, that when one understands a predicate, one understands how things are said to be using that predicate. Rather, what the new version of MRTJ really involves is Russell's elaboration of the understanding-bipolarity connection that Wittgenstein had affirmed in 1913: to understand a predicate is to understand a sentence featuring that predicate, and this in turns means: to know what is the case if the sentence is true *and* to know what is the case if the sentence is false (cf. Wittgenstein 1913: 93–4).

We may conclude, further, that Russell was indeed describing a fresh version of MRTJ, when he wrote, in *On Propositions*, about the theory of belief which he formerly advocated and according to which a belief consists “in a multiple relation of the subject to the objects constituting the ‘objective’, i.e. the fact that makes the belief true or false”. That version, so I have argued in this paper, remains largely implicit in Russell's Lectures, but it is nevertheless there.

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<sup>2</sup> I will refer to the Lectures generically as *PLA*; references to specific passages are by year and page number.

<sup>3</sup> Russell says they might also be called “attitudes”, but he explains that he does not like the term, because there is at least the possibility that not all such verbs are really psychological (1918a: 199).

<sup>4</sup> Russell uses “verb” ambiguously to mean either a linguistic expression, a member in a word class, or (more often) what is expressed by a word in this class; cf. the discussion of atomic facts and particulars in (1918a: 177–8).

<sup>5</sup> Russell (1918b: 265, 268).

<sup>6</sup> Neutral monism – mostly that of William James – is discussed at length in the *Theory of Knowledge* -manuscript; see Russell (1913: Part I, Chapters II and III), which were separately published in Russell (1914).

<sup>7</sup> One of his prison-letters to his brother Frank shows Russell in the middle of this change: “there seems to me a lot of interesting work to be done on Facts, Judgments, and propositions. I had given up Logic years ago in despair of finding out anything more about it but now begin to see new hope. Approaching the old questions from a radically new point of view, as I have been doing lately, makes new ideas possible” (letter to Frank Russell, dated July 1, 1918; quoted in Russell 1986: 248–249).

<sup>8</sup> Russell makes the same point in Lecture IV in his brief criticism of the neutral monist theory of belief, which dispenses with belief as an isolated phenomenon and substitutes for it a behavioristic account of propositional attitudes on which the “logical essence” of an attitudinal fact does not involve propositional reference but a causal chain linking a bodily behavior to a suitable external object (1918a: 195–6). To resolve the dispute, Russell argues, one would have to plunge deep into psychology, which he is not willing to do.

<sup>9</sup> A very clear formulation of the standard story is found, for example, in Candlish (2007: Chapter 3).

<sup>10</sup> MacBride (2013) has recently advanced a similar view; I will consider some elements of MacBride’s interpretation below, in section 6.

<sup>11</sup> Wittgenstein (1922: 5.541–5.5422).

<sup>12</sup> The manuscript notes that Russell composed in 1918 after *PLA* strongly suggest that the imperative of discarding the ‘pin-point subject’ came upon him through a continued reflection on neutral monism, as in the following passage: “It must not be *assumed* that believing, wishing, etc. are irreducible phenomena. If this is assumed, it is very hard to avoid the pin-point Subject, which ought to be avoided if possible. This problem, of getting rid of the pin-point Subject, is a vital one in this topic” (Russell 1918b: 268; italics in the original). The topic is “Propositions”.

<sup>13</sup> “Understatement” is Landini’s (2011: 270) characterization of Russell’s comment on MRTJ in *PLA*.

<sup>14</sup> This label and my description of Wittgenstein’s objection show that I take for granted a simple and straightforward reading of Wittgenstein’s criticism of Russell’s theory of judgment. Wittgenstein’s criticism is formulated in his characteristically brusque and sweeping manner, which gives the conclusion but omits the underlying reasoning (Wrinch 1919: 324–5 gives an equally uncompromising reply to the Wittgenstein-type objection to MRTJ, chalking it up to a “lingering belief in the unity of a proposition”). What matters here,

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however, are not the details of Wittgenstein's objection but *Russell's* use of that objection in the spring of 1914 and thereafter and here the straightforward formulation is the gist of the matter; see section 5 below.

<sup>15</sup> Recall that in late May 1913, Russell and Wittgenstein were engaged in a rather heated exchange over the theory of judgment. In a well-known letter to Lady Ottoline, written on 27 May 1913, Russell told about a meeting with Wittgenstein on the previous day: "Wittgenstein came to see me – we were both cross from the heat – I showed him a crucial part of what I have been writing. He said it was all wrong, not realizing the difficulties, that he had tried my view and knew it wouldn't work" (Griffin 1992: 459). There are reasons to think that the "crucial parts" contained Russell's discussion of the notion of logical form, since Russell had composed that part of the manuscript immediately before their meeting (for a discussion, see Connelly 2014). It is not implausible, then, that Russell's working notes were a reaction to this incident. On the other hand, they contain ideas that are clearly reminiscent of Wittgenstein's *Notes on Logic* (see Carey 2003b). This observation in itself fixes nothing, but it might be taken to suggest that Russell's notes were composed at some later date. The matter deserves further investigation.

<sup>16</sup> The latter suggestion is made by Bonino (2008: 88).

<sup>17</sup> Some of the ideas that Russell sketches in the notes are significantly similar to the psychological theory of judgment that he worked out after *PLA*. With that theory, neutral facts make a kind of return. In the psychological theory, propositions in the fundamental sense are *image propositions* standing in the relation of objective reference to  $\pm$ -facts, which are truth- and falsehood makers; see Russell (1919a: sections 3 and 4) and Russell (1921: Lecture 13). Russell (1921: 272) attributes this basic idea to Wittgenstein, and in working it out, he makes further use of Wittgenstein's ideas, including the twin-notions of propositions as facts and as pictures. It is clear, however, that the picture theory was tailor-made to suit Wittgenstein's notion of an atomic proposition, which is quite different from Russell's. Hence, in fact, Russell had difficulties weaving the different ideas together into a coherent whole. Arguably, it is here that "neutral fact" finds room as the neutral element shared by a proposition and a  $\pm$ -fact. This development, though, lies outside the scope of the present paper.

<sup>18</sup> *Philosophy 21: Advanced Logic*, Harvard University, 1914; Notes by T. S. Eliot. The material is kept in Harvard University Library. I'm grateful to Professor Bernard Linsky for access to transcribed material. **Permission**

<sup>19</sup> See Linsky (2018).

<sup>20</sup> In the version of *Notes on Logic* that Russell took to Harvard, there is the following remark: "A proper theory of judgment must make it impossible to judge nonsense" (Wittgenstein 1913: 97). This claim is immediately preceded by an explanation that on Wittgenstein's theory of the proposition, "p has the same meaning as not-p but opposite sense". This latter point is found in Eliot's notes on April 11<sup>th</sup>, although there Russell uses a slightly different terminology, "denotation" instead of "meaning".

<sup>21</sup> *Theory of Knowledge: Philosophy 9c*, Harvard 1914; Notes by Victor F. Lenzen, edited by Bernard Linsky. Lenzen's notes are kept in the Bertrand Russell Archives, and can be accessed through Digital Archive@McMaster University Library.

<sup>22</sup> One particularly appealing feature of Russell's new doctrine of universals, also noted by MacBride (2013: 233), was that it promised a way out of the puzzle that F. H. Bradley had formulated for relational thought. Bradley's case against the metaphysical validity of relational thought depends on what looks like an annoyingly simple dilemma: either a relation is something to its terms or else it is nothing to its terms; if it is nothing to its terms, then the terms are not related; but if it is something to them, then that requires a new connecting relation, and we have made no progress in explaining the fact of relatedness (Bradley 1893:



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21). Thanks to his “Wittgensteinian turn”, Russell is now in a position to argue that Bradley was misled by grammar: “Bradley conceives a relation as something as substantial as its terms, and not radically different in kind”, and in so doing he has been misled by “the fact that the *word* for a relation is as substantial as the *words* for its terms” (1927: 201); see also Russell (1924: 332–338).

<sup>23</sup> See Russell (1918a: 187–190).

<sup>24</sup> Wittgenstein (1913: 93–4); cf. Russell (1921: 271–3).

<sup>25</sup> See Russell’s discussion of Demos and negative propositions: Russell (1918a: 187–8).

<sup>26</sup> For the criticism, see Prior (1971: Chapter 1.4).

<sup>27</sup> Prior (1971: 9) notes Russell’s change of mind in *PLA* from MRTJ to the two verbs view, but doesn’t elaborate on its implications for Russell.

<sup>28</sup> Since predicates live in sentences, the view that understanding a predicate is fundamentally different from understanding a predicate is just one facet of the deep contrast between names and sentences, a doctrine that Russell got from Wittgenstein; see Russell (1918a: 167–8).

<sup>29</sup> Russell (1919b: 8) explains that we cannot say that a false proposition “means the fact which would make it true if it were true, since there is no such fact”.

<sup>30</sup> See Russell (1919a: 279–80).